301 Beads are merely an ornament and have no ritual value, except
789 the large white ones used by people possessed by the Ba-Ndjao spirits. (Part VI.)

B. HABITATION.

342 While there has been such a rapid change in Thonga customs regarding dress, — so rapid that in these last fifty years they have changed more in that respect than during the fifty preceding centuries —, in the field of architecture the tribe appears to have stood still ; their huts are built precisely as they were in ancient times. It is true that it is easier to put on a jacket and trousers than to alter the style of one's house : besides it must be admitted that the Thonga hut possesses several advantages. It is comparatively easy to construct, cool in the hot weather, perfectly watertight in the rainy season and is fairly ingeniously contrived.

That which is called *yindlu* (yin-tin) properly speaking, is more especially the *roof* of the hut (lwango, dji-ma) ; for it is the roof which is the most troublesome to make. A strange fact too, and one which appears paradoxical, is that, in the construction (ku yaka) of the house, they begin with the roof!

[341] The Thonga architect — and every man is his own in that
335 country — gathers together a few hundred straight sticks, one
342 to one and a half inches in width and from three to ten feet in length. He digs a hole in the ground, a yard and a half in diameter and 16 inches deep, in which he arranges his sticks in a circle, points downwards, at the bottom of the hole, and supported in such a manner that they lie at an angle of 45 degrees with the ground. Any one of these sticks will thus be at about a right angle with the opposite one, and all together they form, as it were, a huge conical basket with its point in the hole. To fasten all the sticks together, he ties them to round hoops (something like cask hoops) made of bent branches. These hoops (balelo, dji-ma) are concentric, very small at the bottom, and getting gradually larger as the work progresses. Any spaces which remain between the sticks first arranged are filled up, one after the other, with

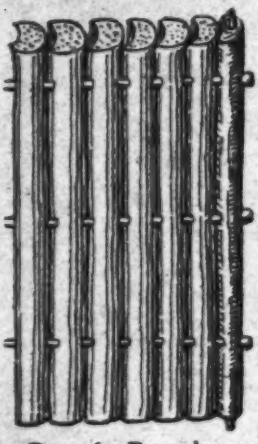
shorter sticks, which are pushed in here and there as the building proceeds, and the architect ends by obtaining a sort of enormous, pointed hat lying on its apex, all the branches and sticks composing it being solidly tied together with strips of a very resistant bark, that of the bulolo Hibiscus (p. 33) or of other trees. It is now only necessary to turn the big cone over, and place it on a wall, and there you have the typical Thonga hut. 335 342

The *wall* is built with stakes, about four feet in length above the ground, planted at intervals along the circumference of a circle which the architect traces with wonderful accuracy in the sand. He then takes two flexible branches and fastens them to the stakes, at a height of one foot above the ground, the whole way round the wall, one on the inside, the other on the outside. Between these branches and in the spaces from stake to stake are inserted reeds of the same height, completing the wall : the reeds are firmly fastened to the supporting branches by a band passing alternately over and underneath them. The same operation is repeated half way up the wall (two feet above the ground), and again at three quarters of the height (three feet). The wall is now ready to put on its large conical hat, which will fit it perfectly : a cone on a cylinder!

Placing the roof in position (ku tlakula yindlu), the next procedure, requires the display of considerable muscular energy. All the men of the village are convened for the job : their strong arms raise the monumental basket and place it triumphantly on the wall. Beer is then given to the helpers, and a little jollification ensues ; the equivalent of the "fête du petit sapin enrubanné" which the carpenters celebrate in Switzerland when they have completed the roof of a house. 342 476

The roof must now be *covered* (fulela) *with a thatch* (byanyi) to make it impermeable to the heavy rains of the wet season, and it is here that considerable ingenuity is displayed in the method adopted. The Thonga pulls up by the roots, in the low lands on the borders of the lakes, a kind of very wide grass (luhlwa), which attains a height of one and a half to two feet : this he separates into small bunches which he lays side by side on the ground and ties together, one by one, with his 342 [824]

introducing the mud between the reeds and spreading it out with the palms of their hands until it forms a smooth layer all over the interior. Not a ray of light can now enter the hut, except through some small open spaces to be seen, here and there, between the roof and the top of the wall. The air circulates more or less through these small vents, which, however, were not included in the original plan of the hut. The remainder of the clay makes a hard even flooring which will be re-covered from time to time with a fresh coating of black plaster (I. p. 187).



Door of a Ronga hut.

As regards the *door*, the Ba-Ronga in the country round Rikatla generally make it of the wood of the mimale palm (Raphia vinifera, see p. 4). They cut down one or two of the giant leaves of this tree, which grows in the marshes. The leaf itself is one enormous central stalk with narrow folioles on either side; these are cut off and the nerve remains: a sort of gigantic switch, twenty to thirty feet in length, about four to six inches wide at the base and tapering gradually to its point, convex on one side, and concave on the other. Once dried, it turns a grey colour: The interior is a fibrous pith, of extraordinarily light weight, whilst the exterior bark is very thin, hard and shiny as though it had been varnished with copal. It is impossible to imagine a lighter wood. Comfortably established under the shady trees of the square, our joiner cuts the nerve into several pieces of a given length (say about four feet, the height of the wall). This is not difficult, for it is only necessary to cut through the thin outer bark, when the knife slips through the inner pith, like so much butter! These lengths are then bored through from front to back in three places, say at one, two and three feet from the bottom, and three stout sticks are passed through the holes, firmly holding the several pieces of the nerve together: this makes the door. The ends of the transverse sticks are fixed into a pole which is pointed top and bottom, thus forming pivots or hinges.